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INDO-EUROPEAN *a :a<sup>i</sup>:a<sup>u</sup>*. A STUDY IN ABLAUT AND IN WORD-FORMATION. By Francis A. Wood, Ph. D. Strassburg, 1905.

Though years have passed since the publication of Wood's book, its lesson has not been learned. Between 1905 and the present there has been printed much etymologizing that was discredited in advance by the volume before us. The reason for this lies partly in the quiet manner of Wood's work and partly in the fact that the observance of Wood's principles lessens one's chance of publishing new etymologies.

The chief etymological principle of Wood's work is stated in § 1: "Synonymy alone is insufficient evidence of relationship." Of this principle the whole book is an illustration, its body being a collection of parallel words in different ablaut-rows, but otherwise alike in form and meaning, as e. g. (§ 535), E. *snap* "schnappen" and cognates (with plain *e* / *o*-vocalism): E. *snip* "schnippen", OSw. *snēpa* "kastrieren" and cognates (with *ei*-vocalism): and ON. *snoppa* "Schnauze" OSw. *snōpa* "kastrieren" and cognates (with *eu*-vocalism). These words are related in meaning but not for that reason of common origin. On the contrary, such similarity of sound as there is may be merely a result of the common meaning, i. e., the common meaning may have assimilated the words in form. Another and in this case more likely possibility is that accidental similarity of sound affected the meaning, or finally, that some of the words were formed on analogies in which others were involved.

Although no one would perhaps try to identify the different members of the above or of most of Wood's groups, it is apparent how the principle involved applies to much modern etymologizing. To quote (§ 6): "For example, we find Germ. *stauma-*; *pauma-*; *dauma-*; 'vapor' in OE, *stēam* 'exhalation, steam'; OHG. *thaum*, *doum* 'dunst'; *toum* 'dunst'. We might assume an IE. *\*dhoumo-* 'vapor', which with prefixed *s-* would give *\*s-dhoumo-*, *\*stoumo-*. From *\*stoumo-* might come in certain positions *\*toumo-*. There would then be three forms: *\*stoumo-*, *\*toumo-*, *\*dhoumo-*. This gives us a very simple phonetic explanation of these three words—but a very absurd one."

Let us mention no names!<sup>1</sup>

Or again, the Greek γνόφος δνόφος ψέφος ψέφας κνέφας "darkness" are derived from various and independent sources: the common meaning has assimilated them in form (§ 5). Syn-

<sup>1</sup> We might add to Wood's statement that the phonetics of such *reim'-dich-oder-ich-hau'-dich* etymologies are usually most shaky: the famous prefixal *s*, prefixed to *d*, *dh*, etc., would by all IE. parallels give not *st*, but *zd*, *zdʰ*.

onymous words might be collected to prove almost any desired sound-law—if synonymy were all that is necessary.

On the other hand, Wood points out (§ 4) that words of similar sound may influence one another's meaning, as in the case of E. *mash* (cf. G. *mischen*), many of whose meanings are due to the influence of E. *smash*, an entirely different word.

In short, the etymologist must take a concrete view of things. He is dealing with historic fact: if he wishes to show that two words are related he must show that their history has really been divergent, not convergent,—that their similarity is not the result of assimilation. Thus (§ 30), of synonymous Gic. *skrimp- hrimp- krimp-* "it is altogether more probable that some developed from others as rime-words than that all are derived phonetically from a common form. . . . Thus from original *skrimp-, hrint-, krink-*, etc., there might arise *skrint-, skrink-; hrimp-, hrink-; krimp-, krint-*.

"*The hypothesis that such forms are phonetically related would not be established by anything short of historical proof.*"<sup>2</sup>

In § 6 Wood attributes such developments as the above especially to the "formative period of a language,"—a concept which we must oppose. A language is formed (i. e., a new speech-community is segregated) by definite changes in the outer surroundings of a group of people—by migrations or the arrival of new neighbors or changes in conditions of communication,—but this has nothing, primarily, to do with those inner processes which are here involved. Greek, and especially Germanic, passed through a period of rime-word formation and word-creation, and what we know of the parent language shows traces of a similar period in IE. times, but such things have nothing directly to do with changing language boundaries. At the time when High German and Dutch, or, say, Greek and Aryan, were first becoming mutually unintelligible, the processes of thought in any of these speech communities were not for that reason other than at other times. The only event which directly changes the inner analogic or phonetic conditions of language is a change in man. The rime-word formation of early Germanic was not a phenomenon of social or political history or geography, but of the human spirit.

We dwell so long on this minor point because our objection to the quoted expression involves exactly the principle taught by Wood's work. Namely, the vocabulary of the IE. languages as we have it is the product of countless analogic and "contaminative" developments, formations, and re-formations, the result of a myriad workings and changes of human language tendencies and habits. It exhibits numberless groups of rime-words, ablaut-parallels, and other traces of associational and

<sup>2</sup> The italics are our own.

emotional activity of the human mind. From this immense material it is easy to gather parallel-words galore to prove almost any desired "phonetic law", especially if the law, like the ciphers of the "Baconians", is formulated ad hoc; but such empty groupings of words and blatant assumptions have no claim to truth. We are dealing with history. The task of the etymologist is not to advertise himself by discovering as many such "sound-laws" as possible, but rather to study faithfully and carefully the actual material before him.

The best illustration possible of what the etymologist should do is Wood's book. It contains almost 500 groups of words illustrating the fact that the three ablaut series (plain-vowel, type *slex-*, vowel+*i*, type *sleix-*; vowel+*u*, type *sleux-*) occur in paralld roots, as in Gr. *φληδάω* "schwätze", *φληδεῖν* "platzen": *φλιδάω* "fliesze über, strotze": *φλυδάω* "fliesze über, zerfliesze" (§ 268). A tenth of Wood's examples might have precipitated some scholars into a vortex of unfounded "phonetic developments"; in the book before us there is no random theorizing. The parallelism in question is exhibited as a fact. Certain processes which must have contributed to its existence are mentioned, and there is ample discussion, as we have above indicated, of the principles involved.

It is needless to add that the book contains many a suggestive grouping of material and many a new etymology,—a phase of the author's work which needs not here to be spoken of, as it is universally well recognized.

To our mind two questions come up which Wood leaves unanswered. The first is: where shall we consider the facts sufficient to indicate that a sound-change has taken place? Our own answer is to point to the "circulus" in which every science moves. Certain sound-changes are obvious, so are certain analogic modifications. Detailed study of what is known will usually guide us in new matters, which in turn will confirm or modify our basic assumptions. The phonetician offers much help, though the setters-up of sound-laws have been slow to accept his delimitations of the probable. Less useful has been the psychologist in matters of analogy. Nevertheless the linguists will in time study analogy and perhaps come to definite results.

The second question involved but not answered in Wood's book is that of semantic change. If "synonymy alone is insufficient evidence of relationship," to what extent is dissimilarity of meaning, in phonetically comparable words, evidence of non-relationship? Wood's answer is, that any meaning may develop from any word. A word meaning "fiddlestick" might in time come to mean "notwithstanding". It is here that we disagree with Wood, not in principle but in application. There seems,

indeed, to be no bound to semantic development, but in a given case far more caution seems to us needed than Wood is wont to apply. The parent language must, for instance, have had some word for so concrete an idea as, say, "sneeze," but so far as we can see, Wood derives every word for this idea from some word of different meaning, such as "rub" or "grate" or "move quickly, snap",—in fact, the parent language, if Wood's semantic derivations were taken together, would appear to have had a rather colorless vocabulary. Though no one can question the commonness of semantic change, it must yet be remembered that on the whole the meaning of words is fairly tough, especially of every-day words. A great many differences in vocabulary must go back to primitive IE. times: indeed, the farther back we look into the history of any IE. language, the more diversified and concrete a word stock do we find.<sup>3</sup> However, any divergence of the reader's opinion from Wood's in this question will not lessen the value of this excellent book or of the sound linguistics embodied in its classically accurate form.

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TALES FROM THE OLD FRENCH. By Isabel Butler. Houghton, Mifflin & Company, Boston and New York, 1910. pp. 265.

The selections from the old French translated by Miss Butler comprise *lais*, *fabliaux* and *contes dévots*. The lays translated are six in number, three from Marie de France, *The Two Lovers*, *Eliduc*, and *The Woful Knight*, and three from other sources, *Melion*, *The Lay of the Bird*, and *The Lay of the Horn*. Only three fabliaux are included in the selection, *The Divided Blanket*, *The Churl who won Paradise*, and the *Gray Palfrey*. The *contes didactiques* which have been selected are *The Knight of the Little Cask*, *The Jousting of Our Lady*, *The Order of Chivalry*, and *The Angel and The Hermit*. These tales are translated into prose, the rendering being almost literal. Following the translation is a bibliography giving a list of the texts which have been followed in the translation and an Epilogue of a dozen or more pages in which *lai*, *fabliau* and *conte dévot* are defined and discussed with reference to their place in mediæval French literature. The purpose of the book is indicated in the "Translator's Note" at the end. "In recent years, in various small books, a number of mediæval French tales, chiefly the lays, have been rendered accessible to English

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jespersen, *Progress in Language*, §272.